

**The Honorable Katherine Harris  
Congressional Testimony – Election Reform  
April 25, 2001**

**A few months ago, the nation watched as Florida's close election ultimately decided the closest presidential election in the modern era - on the basis of existing law, standards, and practice – as administered through our 67 independently elected supervisors of elections.**

**The concerns that surfaced, the challenges presented, were not unique to Florida. Twenty states across America face the very same predicament today – outmoded equipment and a quilt-work of laws and statutes – that could one day place them in the same international spotlight and today, these states are making far less headway in pushing for permanent and effective reforms.**

**Florida's counting and certification system is actually among the most stringent in the nation. Our systems are certified to only make one mistake per one million votes – with six million voters – only six technical or mechanical errors.**

The job before us is mandated by our sworn constitutional duty to ensure the accuracy and integrity of our system of elections. Simply put, we must now resolve to review and improve: Our methods, Our standards, Our technology, and our laws.

In Florida, we have resolved to ask the difficult question, to set a national standard, and with your assistance, create a national model. And by insisting on two unshakable standards:

1) All reforms must reinforce, even bolster voter confidence.

Losing that confidence is unthinkable yet we are shackled by outdated technology and processes grown passe.

2) These reforms must uphold the rulings of the United States Supreme Court, to safeguard our nation's "one vote" doctrine and create a uniform standard. Because the will of the voter must be self-evident...and assured.

Problems surface in every election, and each of us know that band-aid elixirs will not make these issues disappear. The price of failing to follow through

upon our stated commitments for reform will ultimately leave a trail of shattered confidence and lost respect.

Shortly after Florida's bipartisan election reform commission released their recommendations, I submitted my plan to address their suggestions, and many of our own concerns.

First, beginning next year, never again will the punch card ballot be used to decide elections in the State of Florida. Never again.

I have called for a uniform, statewide voting method for the entire State of Florida.

This standardized method would end the practice of "over-votes" by not allowing voters to cast their vote for more than one candidate in any particular race. It would guarantee ballot privacy and confirmation for voters choosing not to vote in every race on the ballot, commonly called "under-votes". Florida will become one of two states in the nation with a uniform optical scan system at the precinct level.

Second, we insist a statewide real time voter registration database, to provide elections officials with a timely and reliable listing of all registered voters. Additionally, I am pushing for enactment of new election statutes that clarify the vagueness and conflict within existing law regarding the protest and contest phases of an election recount. Election laws in many cases provided contradictory direction within different statutes, necessitating state and federal courts to settle the matter.

Finally, this standardized process will prevent long-ignored voter fraud by integrating voter rolls and the entire voting system. That means the one-person, one-vote principle is preserved.

We understand we must restore voter confidence through replacing the punch card system yet we know in choosing the optical scan equipment we have our eyes set on something far superior.

We must develop the technology that fully delivers the reforms we have outlined, I proposed to the Florida Legislature that we lease – not buy-

precinct-based optical scanners for the 2002 election cycle. While such scanners have a lower voter error rate than punch cards, in Florida's 2000 presidential race, they still allowed voter errors of .83 percent. That means an overvote or undervote on more than 8 out of every 1000 ballots. These systems fail to provide consistent accuracy and integrity to the final counts and worse yet, still require one human being to "divine" another's vote in a manual recount. We must do better.

Finally, we must ensure that all of our men and women who serve in the American military have the chance to have their vote count.

Two months ago, in what many saw as a statement reflecting the sentiment of the entire United States Supreme Court, Justice Kennedy said that all would have preferred this issue never have moved to the highest court. But for the Supreme Court, that was never an option.

In Florida, we felt the same sense of duty and responsibility. Taking a pass in the defense of our institutions, our laws and our democracy can only be seen as an act of unconscionable timidity for those charged with leading the way.

Today, I ask the United States Congress to show the same courage of leadership. The problems affecting the American electoral system cannot be solved by local and state governments alone. The funding is simply not there. And as much as we all appreciate words of encouragement, they will fail to make our system of elections fairer, freer, more accurate and more accessible.

Ladies and gentlemen, election reform is not just a Florida imperative. And the chance that history will soon repeat itself in terms of challenged elections – as with the Pullen case in Illinois, the Delahunt case in Massachusetts, and countless others in the past – is very real.

Join with me, and other Secretaries of State who appear before you today, in affirming a simple but powerful truth – that democracy ultimately depends on the faith and confidence of the people.

No, it won't come free, because democracy properly applied is not inexpensive. But what we invest today bears the promise that comes from a more open system of elevating our best to positions of public leadership.

No, it will not be easy. But, it is the right thing to do. It is the right time to do it and it is for all the right reasons.

And when we do the right thing, all of America will have responded to doing little – to doing something great.

#####